

in our great State. He served as president of the Montana Association of Agricultural Educators and advocated for the Advancing Agricultural Education in Montana program that helped create over 25 new agriculture education programs in Montana schools and provided funding to improve the quality of existing programs. Recently, Mr. Heupel received the National FFA Organization's highest degree recognizing him for his exceptional service to agricultural education.

Teachers serve an important role as they shape the minds of young Montanans and help prepare them for future careers. Montana has a rich legacy of agriculture, as it is the primary driver of our economy. There is no doubt that Mr. Heupel's passion for teaching about agriculture helped encourage young Montanans to pursue careers in this important field. In fact, nine of his former students have gone on to become agricultural education teachers themselves.

Passionate educators like Mr. Heupel help make Montana a better place and give students the tools they need to be successful. It is my honor to recognize Mr. Heupel for his devotion to shaping the next generation of Montana agricultural leaders and keeping Montana's rich legacy of agriculture alive. Keep up the great work; you make Montana proud.●

REMEMBERING QUINCY RAMON NELSON-SWEATT

● Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the life of Quincy Ramon Nelson-Sweatt of Rineyville, KY, who passed away Friday, September 2, 2022, at his home, surrounded by his closest family and covered in love.

Quincy was born 9 years ago today, on February 1, 2014, to Timothy Sweatt and Natalie Nelson in Elizabethtown, KY. He was a student at Rineyville Elementary School, where he was in the third grade. He chose to be extraordinarily positive in the midst of the most challenging time, bravely facing diffuse midline glioma, a terminal cancer of the brain and spinal cord.

He never lost his sweet smile that could put anyone at ease—or the way his copper-brown eyes could light up the whole room. He always took such pride in his appearance. From his haircuts and sun-kissed curls to his outfits, he always loved to look his best. Quincy was truly beautiful both inside and out.

Before the date of diagnosis, November 11, 2021, he was a perfectly healthy, active, fun-loving little boy. Within 10 months, he underwent emergency surgery to try to remove the tumor, which was unsuccessful and left him a quadriplegic; he also had 55 rounds of radiation to his brain and spinal cord, along with trying multiple chemotherapy drugs.

He endured the toughest days with grace and positivity that was unmatched. He exhibited such joy, which

was undeniably shared with anyone in his presence. Whether he was singing and dancing to his favorite songs or snuggling with his mama or his cats, Sprinkles and Peaches, he knew how to savor the time he had.

His love for life is indescribable. His list of loves was long and as big as his heart. He loved cars, trampoline jumping, singing to his jams, dancing, playing with his cousins that were like siblings, farming, running outside, and time with his family and friends. His favorite hobbies were singing and listening to music, baseball, go-cart riding, swimming, and playing outside. He was passionate about it all.

Quincy was an empathetic and intuitive old soul that made everyone around him feel special and loved. If you ever need inspiration, meditate for just a minute on his life and the love he shared and choose to live with love.

Quincy was preceded in death by his paternal grandmother Gwendolyn Sweatt. Quincy is survived by his parents, Timothy Sweatt and Natalie Nelson; paternal grandparent, Timothy Buckler; maternal grandparents, Byron and Mary Nelson; aunt and uncles on his father's side, Frederick Sweatt, Freda Sweatt, and Stephen Buckler; on his mother's side aunt and uncles Erin Riffle (Jason) and Clint Nelson; his cousins on his mother's side Ava, Caleb, Hudson, and Charlotte Riffle; and his cousins on his father's side Dallas, Rashaud, and Nia Sweatt.

Quincy will live in the hearts of his family and will be missed more than words could ever describe. Happy Birthday, Quincy.●

VERMONT STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY CONTEST JUDGES

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, since 2010 I have sponsored a State of the Union essay contest for Vermont high school students. This contest gives students in my State the opportunity to articulate what issues they would prioritize if they were President of the United States.

This is the contest's 13th year, and I would like to congratulate the seven volunteer judges who helped choose the contest winners and finalists. The contest relies on its committed team of judges. The judges take time to review each essay and evaluate the diversity in writing that engages students and will benefit them for years to come. The judges' willingness to participate in this project reflects their dedication to both the students and our state, and for that, I graciously thank them.

The judges include:

Andrew Chobanian of Oxbow High School—participant for one year

Lauren Conti of Stowe High School—participant for one year

Jason Gorczyk of Milton High School—participant for ten years

Krista Huling of South Burlington High School—participant for ten years

Mary Schell of White River Valley School—participant for one year

Sarah Soule of Middlebury Union High School—participant for five years

Terri Vest of Twinfield Union School & Vermont Virtual Learning Collaborative—participant for thirteen years

I am very proud to enter the State of the Union Essay Contest judges into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD to recognize their contributions.●

VERMONT STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY WINNERS

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, since 2010, I have sponsored a State of the Union essay contest for Vermont high school students. This contest gives students in my State the opportunity to articulate what issues they would prioritize if they were President of the United States.

This is the contest's 13th year, and I would like to congratulate the 382 students who participated. It is truly heartening to see so many young people engaged in finding solutions for the problems that face our country. To my mind, this is what democracy is all about.

A volunteer panel of Vermont educators reviewed the essays and chose August Howe as this year's winner. August, a junior at Twinfield Union School, wrote about the impact of misinformation on our society and our democracy. J Lahue, a freshman at Burr and Burton Academy, was the second place winner. J wrote about how to address political polarization. Keenan Wallace, a junior at Twinfield Union School, was the third place winner, with an essay on unions and labor rights.

I am very proud to enter into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD the essays submitted by August, J and Keenan:

WINNER, AUGUST HOWE, TWINFIELD UNION SCHOOL, JUNIOR

This past Sunday, January 8th, 2023, rioters stormed official capitol buildings in Brazil. The incident parallels in many ways the January 6th attack on the U.S. capitol, the two-year anniversary of which had passed just two days prior to the Brazil riot. Both events were caused, in part, by misinformation campaigns waged primarily on social media platforms. Both instances are extreme examples of what can happen when misinformation forces people into action against problems that don't exist. Both instances are proof as to why the rise of misinformation and fake news on social media is one of the major problems facing our country.

The past 25 years have seen the rise of the internet and subsequent social media platforms. Starting out as a place to connect with people on a personal level, these platforms have grown to dominate the online landscape and now serve as many people's primary source of information. They have strayed from their original purpose, developing into money generating machines that rely on user's constant engagement. Tapping into people's psychology is the main way social media platforms and those on it obtain such participation, and unfortunately, negative and emotionally-manipulating content is what gains the most attraction. As a result, social media platforms breed negativity, division, and ultimately, distorted opinions that turn into mis- and disinformation and fake news on just about every subject out there.

The solution to such a problem is complicated and far from perfect, but there are still a few options. Social media platforms are essentially news sources at this point, yet they are not held to the same legal standards. News sources are liable for the content they release, social media platforms, however, are exempt from such liability by Section 230, a law passed by the U.S. Congress that protects all providers and users of interactive computer services from liability for the content on these platforms, regardless of whether it is true or false. Originally created to protect internet user's speech, Section 230 now enables people to exercise their freedom of speech and introduce misand disinformation into the media stream without consequence. By repealing Section 230 and holding social media companies responsible for the content on their platforms, we will hold them to the same standards as established news outlets, and force them to do more to stop the spread of misinformation on their platforms.

Equally as important as holding companies accountable is encouraging the education of the general public on media literacy and critical thinking skills to identify misinformation and fake news. An educated population is essential to a well-governed population, and that education must now include media literacy. Programs should be implemented in schools, starting as young as elementary students, to teach how to identify fake news and be media literate.

Regulating social media platform like standard news outlets, and educating the general population are the best ways we can defend our country's democracy from the threat of misinformation in social media.

SECOND PLACE, J LAHUE, BURR AND BURTON ACADEMY, FRESHMAN

Political polarization, or the divergence of political beliefs away from the center towards ideological extremes, is a prominent problem and a threat to democracy. Americans continue to create more divides between people who have opposing views, and the result, an astounding lack of empathy plagues our country. The 2019 government shutdown and the violent January 6th insurrection were both major consequences that stemmed from political polarization. This rise of extreme ideologies can be attributed to various factors, such as media partisanship, hostility between political opponents, and economic inequality. These factors then lead to congressional gridlock, lack of trust, an increase in violence, and, most importantly, a lessened sense of community. But, there are steps that, if taken, could stop polarization at its roots.

To solve political polarization, I propose a new bill, titled The Unity Act, to address the underlying problems. This bill would create forums to unify people and cultivate common ground by promoting dialogue and understanding and addressing economic inequality. While political polarization is a scary threat to democracy and the Nation we live in, we can bridge the divides with the following measures.

The first way the bill would eliminate polarization is by targeting economic inequality. By increasing the minimum wage to just 10 dollars and 10 cents, around four million people would be taken out of poverty. Similarly, investing in education, especially Pre-K, would improve economic mobility. Furthermore, The Unity Act would expand the Earned Income Tax Credit to bring children above the poverty line. These reforms would solve economic inequality, a major cause of extreme ideologies because inequality leads to social divisions.

With the investment in education, the bill would also encourage middle schools to

teach media literacy and how to differentiate between fake and factual information. Teaching this important skill at a young age would lessen the negative effects of misinformation. The bill would also recommend schools teach tough topics to create more dialogue and thus reduce the risk of extreme partisan views.

While these reforms would address the underlying problems, the major initiative would target polarization through Citizen Assemblies. Citizen Assemblies would be held in the counties of each State monthly. They would bring people together to speak about divisive issues that need to be addressed. Assemblies would select participants in the same way as jury duty so they could engage in political deliberation with their ideas directed towards the State and National Government. These assemblies would effectively establish common ground to reduce extreme partisan views.

In conclusion, political polarization is an increasing problem that undermines democracy through issues like lack of trust and a lost sense of unity. By correcting economic inequalities, bettering the education system, and introducing Citizen Assemblies, polarization can be slowly eliminated. If passed, The Unity Act would create a bridge to improve the welfare of American citizens by cultivating common ground. Especially as newer and more partisan issues emerge, it is imperative that we strive towards a more cohesive Nation by addressing political polarization.

THIRD PLACE, KEENAN WALLACE, TWINFIELD UNION SCHOOL, JUNIOR

One of the most pressing issues facing our society today is the issue of labor rights. Recently there has been a slew of confrontations between workers and corporations, from Starbucks and Amazon to the threatened rail strikes earlier this year, 2022 has been tumultuous. The way that each of these confrontations were negotiated either within the corporation or, in the case of the rail strikes, by the United States Government sends an important message, our workers' rights are not the priority.

In November of this year Starbucks employees organized a walkout at more than 100 Starbucks locations in protest of Starbucks repeated refusal to negotiate contracts with labor unions. Many workers cited being underpaid, understaffed and overworked. But Starbucks has been adamant in their anti-union stance, giving pay increases selectively to locations that had not voted to unionize, firing union organizers, refusing to negotiate contracts with union representatives, and taking steps to prohibit union elections at its stores. Unfortunately, this union busting attitude is not exclusive to Starbucks. At Amazon, one of the world's largest corporations, the same issues repeat themselves. Low pay, oppressive and, at times unsafe working conditions, as well as aggressive anti-union policies are also apparent there.

Earlier this year the 12 largest rail unions threatened to strike in protest of low pay and a lack of paid sick leave. Because of the massive economic impact, a strike like this would have the US government stepped in. In November President Biden brokered a deal between the major rail unions and the rail corporations. This deal promises a 24 percent wage increase over the next five years, but it critically lacks any guaranteed paid sick days. This lack of sick days led four of the 12 major unions to reject the deal. Despite this Biden stepped in and asked Congress to impose the deal onto the Unions, disregarding their decision. This sets a precedent for corporations like Starbucks and Amazon to disregard labor unions.

The framework for the solution is already in place. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is an agency that was created to enforce the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). This agency is responsible for helping organize unions and they step in when corporations violate the NLRA. Unfortunately, the NLRB is tremendously underfunded and since 2014 it has received no budget increases, resulting in an effective budget cut of more than 20 percent due to inflation. Additionally, under the Trump administration the agency's leadership was gutted, further challenging the fight for unionization. Under Biden the NLRB's performance has increased, but it is not enough. By increasing the NLRB's funding, its ability to organize unions, achieve justice for wronged workers and keep corporations in check would increase dramatically.

Increasing funding for the NLRB is a simple, low cost solution to a problem that has plagued the American working class for decades. A stronger NLRB would not only be a boon for workers, but also a valuable tool for the government to check the ever-increasing power that corporations hold over our democracy.●

VERMONT STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY CONTEST FINALISTS

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD some of the finalists' essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the 13th Annual State of the Union Essay contest conducted by my office.

The material follows:

FINALISTS

JACOB ANTONOVICH, BELLOWS FREE ACADEMY
FAIRFAX, SENIOR

My grandfather, Robert Antonovich, got drafted into the Korean War where he served in the Army. At the present moment he lays dying, at home, and without much dignity. My grandfather is in dire need of hospice as he goes through his last stages of life but at 88, he is unable to afford privatized healthcare and my grandma (aged 90) is of little help. Fortunately, as a result of my grandfather's service he is entitled to receive benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). What upsets me is that where a privatized hospice service could be there in 24 hours, after almost two weeks, the VA is still unable to get anyone there to help my grandfather walk through his last life with the dignity he deserves.

Beyond my grandfather, millions of Americans who put their lives on the line to serve this country are stuck without much dignity. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless; between 130,000 and 200,000 veterans are homeless on any given night which represents between one fourth and one fifth of all homeless people. After putting their lives on the line, why are so many veterans being dumped on the streets in such poor conditions? Many of these problems could be fixed by providing proper funding and ensuring that the security of veteran relief organizations is a top priority. For instance, of the \$300 Billion budget for the VA only about one percent was spent on homeless care programs. The VA's budget is even less for community care, which covers hospice services. Based on the 2023 Budget submission for the VA, less than .0004 percent of the budget was allocated to community care. To make matters worse, hospice care is only a portion of that already small percentage leaving very little money to help those in need.

The poor treatment of veterans is a major problem in this Nation. To fix this, I suggest